

**Amendments to the Claims:**

Please cancel claims 1, 6-8, and 9, without prejudice.

Please amend claims 2-5 and 10-11, as specified in the following listing of claims.

The listing of claims given below will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Canceled)
2. (Currently amended) ~~The operating device as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that~~  
An operating device for operating gas discharge lamps, comprising:
  - a regulation device for regulating the power of connected gas discharge lamps to a desired power;
  - a setting device for limiting a lamp current of connected gas discharge lamps to a limit value;
  - a detection device designed to output a signal to the control device if a limit value setting is too low, in order to put a connected gas discharge lamp into a state in which the lamp assumes the desired power; and
  - a control device that prescribes the limit value for the setting device and increases the limit value if the detection device sends a signal to the control device, wherein the control device detects an arc voltage via a measuring device and sets the limit value as a function of the arc voltage by means of a stored characteristic curve.
3. (Currently amended) ~~The operating device as claimed in of claim 2, characterized in that~~  
wherein the control device activates a further stored characteristic curve upon receiving a signal from the detection device.

4. (Currently amended) ~~The operating device as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that~~

An operating device for operating gas discharge lamps, comprising:

- a regulation device for regulating the power of connected gas discharge lamps to a desired power;
- a setting device for limiting a lamp current of connected gas discharge lamps to a limit value;
- a detection device designed to output a signal to the control device if a limit value setting is too low, in order to put a connected gas discharge lamp into a state in which the lamp assumes the desired power, wherein the detection device includes a time measuring device which sends a signal to the control device after expiry of a prescribed time following ignition of a connected gas discharge lamp; and
- a control device that prescribes the limit value for the setting device and increases the limit value if the detection device sends a signal to the control device.

5. (Currently amended) ~~The operating device as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that~~

An operating device for operating gas discharge lamps, comprising:

- a regulation device for regulating the power of connected gas discharge lamps to a desired power;
- a setting device for limiting a lamp current of connected gas discharge lamps to a limit value;
- a detection device designed to output a signal to the control device if a limit value setting is too low, in order to put a connected gas discharge lamp into a state in which the lamp assumes the desired power, wherein the detection device detects the rise in an arc voltage via a measuring device and sends a signal to the control device if the rise is below a prescribed value; and
- a control device that prescribes the limit value for the setting device and increases the limit value if the detection device sends a signal to the control device.

6. (Canceled)

7. (Canceled)

8. (Canceled)

9. (Canceled)

10. (Currently amended) ~~The method as claimed in claim 9, characterized in that~~

A method for operating gas discharge lamps, the method comprising the steps of:

- setting, after ignition of the gas discharge lamp, a warm-up lamp current that is selected to be so low that electrodes of a connected gas discharge lamp are not damaged, wherein the warm-up lamp current is set as a function of an arc voltage, this dependence being adopted from a stored characteristic curve;
- detecting whether the set warm-up lamp current puts the gas discharge lamp into a state in which the gas discharge lamp assumes the desired power; and
- raising the warm-up lamp current in the case when it is detected that the set warm-up lamp current does not suffice to put the gas discharge lamp into a state in which it assumes the desired power.

11. (Currently amended) ~~The method as claimed in claim 9, characterized in that an increase in claim 10, wherein the step of raising the warm-up lamp current is achieved by switching over to a further stored characteristic curve.~~